

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands

[parks](#) - - Rep. Joel Hefley, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6207 - - (202) 226-7736

Witness Statement

**Statement by Darrell Johnson, of Rush Valley, Utah
before the U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Land
July 19, 2001**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am Darrell Johnson. Along with my wife Carol, I own and operate the Johnson Ranch in Rush Valley, Tooele County, Utah. My sons Ed and Brian and their wives and my parents, who were the former owners, also have a significant interest in our nearly 7,000 acres of all-private, deeded and leased ranch land. We are cow-calf operators, running about 250 cows year-round. Ours is a ranch with a pioneer family heritage running back to 1856 when Luke S. Johnson was the first settler in our valley, after having arrived in Utah with the earliest Mormon pioneers. His dugout for a home on 40 acres of land has been developed by succeeding generations into a ranch that I'm proud to say was recognized last year as the Region 6 National Stewardship Award winner from the National Cattlemens Beef Association.

The private grazing land on our ranch is very productive after years of chaining and burning brush and seeding with carefully selected grasses that on some areas now produce over 1,400 pounds of forage per acre. We have abundant wildlife on our land and we have a large spring that provides irrigation for about 1,500 acres in our community. We are continually working to improve our place for future generations.

I say all this to help you understand how devastating the cricket and grasshopper infestation is to my operation and those of my neighboring ranchers and farmers. For several years we have had damage from crickets and grasshoppers in our area and in much of Utah, but our most severe damage began last year. In my area private land owners are mostly surrounded on several sides by Forest Service and BLM land. Last year crickets moved from federal land in Skull Valley over Johnson Pass to about 2,000 acres of our deeded grazing land, which we use for summer feed. After the damage on that land, they laid eggs there and on other nearby federal land where they hatched and brought us this year's terrible infestation; the worst I've ever seen.

I started trying to control the crickets on my land this April, locating the most dense concentrations and circling them with approved bait. It soon became futile. The crickets, now being followed by grasshoppers, ate our alfalfa to the ground and virtually every leaf off the crested wheat grass. There was no way I, or my neighbors, could stop them. The crickets do their damage and move on in literal waves to another area and again take almost everything in their path, followed now by grasshoppers from adjacent public land.

Our best estimate at this time is that these insects have destroyed at least 75 percent of our forage. So if we are to stay in business, our only choice is to buy hay to replace this feed. To be conservative, I am going to say that my total loss of private forage will be 60 percent of my normal yields. That converts to at least \$15,000 in hay that I will have to buy this year that I would not have purchased in any normal year.

Even worse, last year I put down new seed on about 370 acres of deeded range land that would have been a high producer of feed this coming year. The crickets have eaten all those plants into the dirt. If those seedlings don't recover, it will cost nearly \$13,000 to seed it again, not counting the fact that I'll have about two years to wait for any meaningful production on that area. I have attached a partial list of cricket damage in an adjacent area prepared by the Grantee Spring Water Company.

Mr. Chairman, my story is repeated again and again on Utah's farms and ranches. We in the West know we must contend with drought, variable markets and a heavy layer of government regulations. But this insect infestation, coming in large measure from uncontrolled or inadequately-controlled populations on adjacent public land, is an element that we alone cannot overcome. We appreciate the efforts of our Utah Department of Agriculture & Food to reduce cricket populations on state-owned land and some cost-share money for bait or spray on private land. But again, an army of insects, hatched and grown to traveling size on public land is more than we can deal with unless federal land managers can control them before they move onto our land. So I add my voice to that of others who are appealing to congress to give our neighboring public land managers the tools to be good neighbors.

Thank you for listening. We hope you can help.

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